

The DX Bulletin

SPECIAL REPORT

• America's Oldest Weekly Amateur Radio Publication •

Chod Harris VP2ML Editor

The Super DX Edge

A The DX Bulletin Review

by Chod Harris VP2ML

Xantek Inc. has improved their popular computer program The DX Edge, by adding Maximum Usable Frequencies (MUFs) and Great Circle Bearings to the existing sunrise, sunset, and grayline information. The result places a comprehensive combination of real-time DX information at the DXer's fingertips. (The DX Bulletin has already reviewed The DX Edge; this review will cover only the new features of the program: MUF and great circle bearings.)

Determining Maximum Usable Frequencies

The new MUF and great circle options show up on the program's main menu, and are accessed with a single keystroke. Then the program prompts you for the locations of the two stations (yours and the DX station, for example), as well as the calendar date and sunspot number or solar flux.

After you enter the date and SSN or flux, the program calculates and displays the MUF hour by hour (see photo.)

The DX Bulletin found the MUF feature straightforward and easy to use. A world atlas helps in pinpointing the two station locations, but once that information is entered in any part of the program, it can be reused in the other parts, such as great circle bearing and grayline calculations.

Super DX Edge uses MINIMUMUF, an MUF program published in Dec. 1982 QST. The MUF predictions tend to be on the high side, but quite accurate for the DXer with a well-equipped station. The DX Bulletin compared Super DX Edge's MUF predictions on several long-haul, east-west paths against actual reports; the program accurately identified each band opening. With a little experience, the active DXer can 'fudge' or adjust the SSN or flux figure to more accurately reflect his own station's capabilities.

Using the MUF Information

DXers can use this program to suggest schedules or to look for particular stations. Contesters can use the program to search for band openings, while DXpeditioners can identify the best times to work various parts of the world.

The DX Bulletin also played sunspot god, by watching what happened to MUFs along a particular path as the solar flux increased. An increase in flux from 66 to 80 was enough to bump the MUF from 20 meters to 15 on a W6-VP2M path, for example.

Great Circle Bearings

Another addition to the program is Great Circle Bearing calculations. You provide location information as above, and Super DX Edge determines and displays direct and long-path bearings, and great circle distances.

The DX Bulletin found the Super DX Edge an accurate and useful tool for the DX shack. We can, however, suggest some possible improvements for future editions: The MUF display would be easier to interpret in a graphic form, such as QST's prop charts. And the MINIMUMUF program does not take absorption into account, nor is it accurate for long north-south paths (such as the optimistic data in the photo.) But my Super DX Edge disc will never be far from the disc drive. The copy-protected Super DX Edge is available from P.O.Box 834, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159 for \$34.95. DX Edge owners can upgrade their old discs for \$10 less.

MUF RESULTS

DATE: FEB 15
TRANSMITTER: (LOCATION 1-W6)
LATITUDE: 38N LONGITUDE: 122W
RECEIVER: (LOCATION 2-UNIQUE)
LATITUDE: 68S LONGITUDE: 98W
SUNSPOT NUMBER: 1.41

| HOUR | MUF (MHZ) | HOUR | MUF (MHZ) |
|------|-----------|------|-----------|
| 0 | 23.9 | 12 | 12.7 |
| 1 | 23 | 13 | 12.2 |
| 2 | 21.9 | 14 | 16 |
| 3 | 20.4 | 15 | 21.3 |
| 4 | 18.1 | 16 | 23.7 |
| 5 | 16.2 | 17 | 24.3 |
| 6 | 14.8 | 18 | 24.8 |
| 7 | 13.6 | 19 | 25.1 |
| 8 | 12.6 | 20 | 25.2 |
| 9 | 11.8 | 21 | 25.1 |
| 10 | 11.1 | 22 | 24.9 |
| 11 | 10.3 | 23 | 24.5 |

PRESS = FOR MENU PRESS ANY TO REPEAT

The Super DX Edge predicts MUFs from California to Peter I Island on Feb. 15.

DXCC Restructuring
Ethics, Part 2: QSLing
No Money, No Card

In September, The DX Bulletin reported Tom Gregory's QSL instructions for his TU2NW, ZS6USA, 5T5NW, 9Q5NW, and other African operations. Tom said "Cards from stateside stations arriving via bureau will be discarded. Stateside cards without postage or donation will not be answered. If you want my card, send an SASE or postage money." This pronouncement prompted a flood to mail to The DX Bulletin. Typical comments:

"Although I have had good success over the years with the bureau in the United Kingdom, here in the US a very different attitude seems to exist. Pretty much all of the DXers I have spoken to about QSLing say that direct with dollar bills (green stamps) or IRCs is the only way to go. Now I see that if I want to get a card from a Tom Gregory QSO, I have to go direct with an SASE. At \$0.44 a shot for two-way postage, any DXer is going to run up a postage bill of several hundred dollars a year, if he actually wants to prove that he is a DXer, if every DX station or manager takes the same attitude. According to the ARRL, as long as one end of a QSO is with a DX station, it is okay to use their bureau, even if a stateside manager is involved. So why not use the bureau? Who gains from Tom's policy of discarding stateside cards from the bureau? What is the point of this? I just do not understand why a particular group of people (ie, statesiders) should be discriminated against in this way. The total costs, apart from the QSL card itself, of sending a card through the bureau is between \$0.01-.02. Even if a manager sent out 10,000 cards a year this way, we are looking at a total cost of less than \$400 for QSLs in both directions. Maybe there is a part of this puzzle of whose existence I am not aware, but my question is sincere and needs answering. In the meanwhile I guess I shall be doing my bit to keep the US Postal Service in business instead of buying a rig to replace my 15-year-old HW101! - Doc Evans NQ0I

"I find the comments by Tom Gregory very disturbing in the requirement for SASE or 'donations' in order to receive a QSL card. This harkens back to the 4Z4TT Pacific operation where a 'contribution' was mandatory to receive a card. Part of the DXAC study into DXCC restructuring addresses ethics. This seems to fall toward, if not under, the unethical category. I know all the standard responses he can give, but why the discrimination toward US stations? - Bob Beatty W4VQ

"In the current issue [I354], I don't like ZS6USA's comment of not accepting bureau QSLs. If you are on the air, you should QSL 100% or get another hobby. Some people are poor, you know. I QSL 100% from my Caribbean trips." - Dave Klimaj W4JVN

Tom's attitude is not unique to stateside managers. The French DX weekly Les Nouvelles DX bemoans F6FNU's policy of requiring 'excess' postage from French DXers. Example: F3xx sent a card to F6FNU for a QSO with 4S7PVR. He included an SASE with a 2.20 F stamp. F3xx received his 4S7PVR QSL like a post card with an 1.80 F stamp, and the mention "please next time a stamp in excess."

LNDX believes the discrimination against French DXers is "very easy to understand. When we [French DXers] send him a letter with an SASE and French postage, he will not have any money for his pocket. The problem is different with the foreign station, if you include IRCs or green stamps, he will have an excess for him, and, we are sure, he will make a very good job for you! For us, the exchange of QSLs is an exchange, not a payment for his job or QSL."

The DX Bulletin's Comment: All DXers will agree that insisting on some sort of donation or payment for a QSL is unethical. Amateur radio is, after all, an amateur activity, and direct payments of any kind are against the spirit of the hobby. The most extreme example of this unacceptable DX behavior was Don Miller's practice of only hearing those DXers who had made a contribution to his travels! DXers who balked at this demand never made it into Don's log, while weaker-signaled neighbors who had sent along a few bucks ahead of time were solid 59.

But what about the above borderline case of not answering domestic bureau cards, or cards without an SASE? Or stations such as "Buck-a-card George" Collins VE3FXT, who will QSL without payment only if you are lucky enough to catch him in person? Most DX stations and their managers make a concerted and honest effort to answer every card, no matter how it arrives. Cards without sufficient postage for direct return can always be sent back via the effective (if slow) world-wide bureau system. So what is the rationale for discarding bureau cards?

Active DX stations can receive thousands of QSLs every year, and the costs of merely printing the cards can quickly exceed hundreds of dollars. Many of these domestic bureau cards, especially contest QSLs, are either duplicates or come from stations that routinely QSL 100% and aren't really interested in your card. If the DXer doesn't ask for a return card, and shows so little interest in the response that he doesn't even include a few cents worth of postage or a return envelope, than why should the DX station bother?

While The DX Bulletin can appreciate this attitude, we feel it runs counter to the true spirit of DX and DXing. Answering the bureau cards provides a valuable service to the DX community, especially in encouraging neophyte DXers to continue their pursuit of New Ones. Nor does answering these cards have to be a financial burden to the DX station. The DX Bulletin suggests printing inexpensive "quick-print" QSLs to reduce costs for bureau responses. Save the fancy (and expensive) four-color QSLs for those who send postage or a donation, and use the cheapie cards for the others.

After 10 years and more than 100,000 cards, my own QSL account is essentially even: the extra (unsolicited) donations and IRCs over and above return postage have exactly paid for the costs of printing and distribution of the responses to bureau cards. (My QSLs may not be much to look at, but they do confirm the contact!) So there really isn't any financial reason to discard domestic bureau cards.

If the problem is one of disinclination of the QSL manager, then The DX Bulletin suggests arranging for a second "manager" who would volunteer to handle the bureau cards. There are dozens of DXers who would jump at the chance to answer these cards. A second manager for bureau cards may delay response slightly, but nobody ever said QSL bureaus were fast, only inexpensive.

The DX Bulletin recommends that DX stations that refuse to respond to QSLs without some sort of payment should be banned from DXCC.

If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It

A common thread among DXers discussing DXCC restructuring is that the DXCC program is just fine as it is, and it needs no tinkering. ARRL New England Division Director Tom Frenaye K1KI has compared DXCC application statistics from 1975 and 1986 to identify some trends over the past 11 years to test the presumption that the program is completely healthy.

Tom noted that while the number of QSL cards checked by the DXCC branch has doubled over the past 11 years, the average number of new applicants from the USA has actually declined during the same period! Despite addition of several new DXCC awards during the time period, the number of new DXCC applicants has not kept pace with the growth in amateur population.

These and other trends in the data suggest to Tom that the DXCC program is not very appealing to newly licensed amateurs. He says that the ARRL is not adequately translating high-interest prospective amateurs into DXCC participants. He guesses that prolonged controversies over possible New Countries have sapped the energy from the program.

Tom recommends investigating the possibility of checking some QSL cards for DXCC at local points: DX Clubs, IARU societies, etc. "I know this is a touchy subject, but couldn't a 'core' list of the relatively easy countries be checked elsewhere for the initial award?" he comments. Tom goes on to recommend generating more long-term positive PR on the DXCC program and DXing in general by publishing more DXpedition articles (and similar topics) in QST and a further reduction in listings of DXCC members, as can be found in the December 1986 QST.

Operating Aids Available

Dennis N7CKD has compiled a detailed list of **World Top Band Frequency Allocations**. The 7-page list is now in its fourth edition, and includes 160 meter band breakdowns for about 250 countries. The list is in prefix order, and includes CW and SSB subbands. Copies of the list are available for \$3.50 first class mail to USA, Canada, and Mexico, or US\$5.50 for foreign airmail, from Dennis G. Peterson N7CKD, 4248 A Street SE, Space 609, Auburn, WA 98002 USA.

Dieter OE2DYL has published the latest edition (#6/87) of his **DX Net List**. The list covers daily and weekly DX nets, and is available for US\$3 or 4 IRCs from Dieter Konrad OE2DYL, Bessarabierstrasse 39, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria.

The Burma Question

The socialist government of Burma XZ is becoming increasingly isolationistic. Last year they threw out all foreign business representatives, except Japanese nationals. Last week they gave the Japanese until the end of the year to clear out of Burma. The odds of a legitimate amateur radio operation from Burma now seem even more remote!

The question of Burma is of more than academic interest to DXers. The ARRL DXCC branch has a policy of not accepting QSL cards from countries that have officially stated that amateur radio is banned within that country, such as Burma. The League has received a copy of an official letter stating that no amateur radio operation has been permitted in Burma since Jan. 1, 1964. However, Don Miller's XZ2TZ operation was in 1965, and thus should not be counted!

DXCC Branch chief Don Search W3AZD said he thought the settlement of Miller's lawsuit against the League included reference to Burma, but there is no mention of Burma in the final settlement, which is printed in the Oct. 1968 issue of QST.

AWARDS

Islands On The Air

The Islands On The Air (IOTA) award program was created in the mid-1960s by Geoff Watts, a leading British short wave listener. The Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB) took over the program at Geoff's request in 1985.

The IOTA program offers 15 separate awards for working islands and island groups around the world. The program administrators have attempted to include most of the world's islands from the World Atlas of the National Geographic Society. They have grouped the islands geographically to produce some 600 possible entries. An interesting wrinkle on the IOTA list is that many islands are on the list but do not yet count toward the award. Only islands that have seen amateur radio activity receive an IOTA reference number, and are then used to determine award status. About 400 islands and groups currently meet that that requirement.

This leaves plenty of opportunity for enterprising DXers to put a "New One" on the air for IOTA. A good example are the Farallon Is. just outside San Francisco Bay. Although visible from the Golden Gate bridge on a clear day, the islands are seldom visited. Someone who could wrangle landing permission (perhaps to count seals) could put the Farallons on the air for the first time.

IOTA has been very popular in Europe, where high amateur population densities and many off-shore islands produce regular pileups. Summer DXpeditioning to IOTA entries has saturated the region, with more than 100 qualified entries in the European continent.

Interest in IOTA has increased on this side of the Atlantic as well, thanks to fewer sunspots and DXCC stagnation. To assist North American IOTA DXers, The DX Bulletin is pleased to announce that official IOTA Island Directories will be available from TDXB effective Feb. 1, 1987. Cost of the 15-page listing and award rules is US\$3, postpaid. Note: TDXB will not check award applications or cards; we will only distribute the latest copy of the IOTA Directory from RSGB.

73 Magazine's DX Dynasty Award

Wayne Green W2NSD and the gang at 73 Magazine has come up with an interesting twist on DX awards. Their new Dynasty Award is based on award programs of IARU member societies. If a member of the IARU recognizes a particular country for one of their awards, 73 Magazine includes that country in their list. Thus in addition to all DXCC countries (the ARRL is a member of the IARU), the Scottish Shetland Is., Sicily, and even the Vienna International Radio Centre 4U1VIC are on the Dynasty Award list.

This approach gives even the most avid DXer plenty of opportunity for DXcitement. And the award kicks off on January 1, 1987, so everyone can start fresh with the new year. Nor is 73 requiring QSLs. As with the ARRL Golden Jubilee DXCC Award, only log information is required. You don't ever have to send for the cards!

Complete Dynasty Award countries list and application forms are available for an SASE from 73 Magazine, WGE Center, Peterborough NH 03458.

[Hmmm. Montserrat Amateur Radio Society is a member of the IARU. If they would sponsor an award where the Eastern side of Montserrat is recognized as a separate country, than VP2ML can be a New One for the DX Dynasty Award! Or maybe MARS can offer a "Marginal Country" award for working such non-DXCC entities as Rockall, Aruba, the Pribolofs, Council of Europe (TP2CE), and others. Lots of possibilities here....-ed.]

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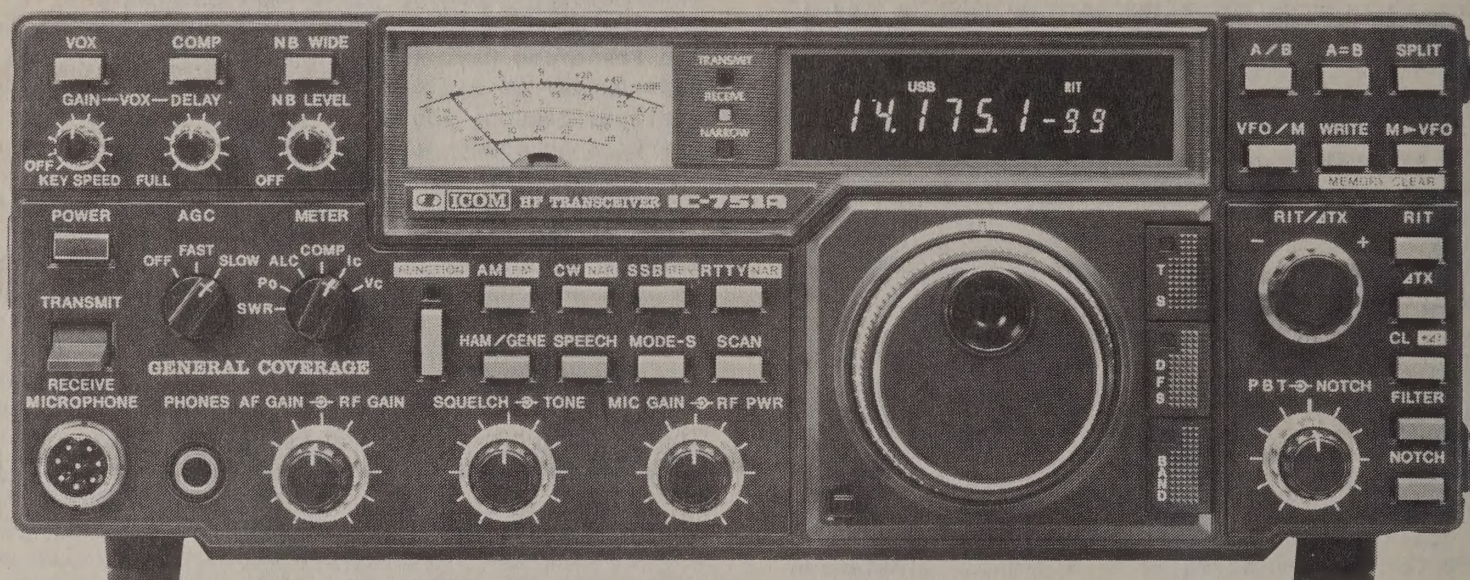
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